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ABSTRACT

This study used the narrative-biographical and micro-political perspectives as a theoretical framework to explore how beginning teachers experienced the induction phase, focusing on their experience with professional socialization and ways in which they were confronted with the micro-political realities of schools during induction. Participants were 14 beginning teachers in Flemish primary schools who had been teaching for a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 5 years. Using questionnaires and interviews, respondents reflected on their careers and narratively shared their experiences and the meaning they took from them. Data analysis indicates that micro-politics encompassed both struggle and conflict and collaboration and coalition building. Results are presented according to different categories of interest and how they determined the micro-political reality of teachers: (1) self-interests; (2) material interests; (3) organizational interests; (4) cultural-ideological interests; and (5) social-professional interests. (Contains 47 references.) (SM)

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Developing micro-political literacy. A narrative-biographical study on teacher development

Paper for the symposium "Micro-politics in school reform and teacher development",

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Developing micro-political literacy. A narrative-biographical study on teacher development

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1. TEACHER INDUCTION: BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

1.1. Beginning teachers and their professional socialisation

The most studied phase in teacher careers is without any doubt the induction period, the first years as a beginning teacher (e.g. Veenman, 1984; Jordell, 1987; Huberman, 1989; Freshour & Hollman, 1990; Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993; Kelchtermans, 1993; Kuzmic, 1994; Tickle, 1994; Borich, 1995; Gold, 1996; Janssens & Kelchtermans, 1997; Vonk, 1994). These studies show that making the move from teacher education to actual professional practice is quite difficult for many teachers and often significantly influences the next career stages (Veenman, 1984; Huberman, 1989; Gold, 1996). Sikes et al. (1985) describe the induction phase as an "intrinsic critical phase". Gold contends that "few experiences in life have such a tremendous impact on the personal and professional life of a teacher as do the first years of teaching" (Gold, 1996, p. 548; Rust, 1994). Although in several countries induction programs or forms of mentorship have been established, to many beginning teachers the confrontation with the complexities and responsibilities of a classroom still seems to provoke a form of "praxis shock" (Gold, 1996; Veenman, 1984; Wideen, Mayer-Smith & Moon, 1998). The paradox of teachers learning to teach while they are teaching today still holds in many respects.

"Praxis shock" refers to the confrontation with the realities and responsibilities of being a classroom teacher that puts their beliefs and ideas about teaching to the test, challenges some of them, confirms others. Teachers learn that being a teacher entails much more than teaching a group of pupils (which is quite a challenge in itself already), but also implies dealing with the demands of a principal and colleagues, of parents and a school board; taking up a whole series of administrative tasks, and so on (Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993; Rust, 1994, p. 214).

Huberman (1989) found that the first phase in the teaching career is characterised by two central themes, "survival" and "discovery". Beginning teachers discover the joy of teaching. They are enthusiastic, committed and get a lot of satisfaction from working with children and developing a relationship with them, from being able to arrange their classrooms and take autonomous decisions about their teaching. Contrary to this positively experienced 'discovery' stands the concern about "surviving" all the demands and challenges. Rust (1994, p.208) observed an alternation of euphoria and panic in beginning teachers' struggle with the job demands. Teachers experience self concerns, feelings of uncertainty and self doubt and are very preoccupied with themselves (Fuller, 1969). They are concerned with questions like "What will others (principal, parents, colleagues, pupils) think of

me?". They feel vulnerable to external criticism and feelings of personal failure (Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992; Borich, 1995; Kelchtermans, 1996).

1.2. The school as an organization - Beyond the classroom

Most research on beginning teachers focused on problems directly related to classroom teaching (Gold, 1996). The emphasis was on issues of (insufficient) didactical competence, problems with authority and effective class management (Veenman, 1984). Much less attention was given to the fact that beginning teachers also become members of an organisation. Nevertheless this organisational socialisation constitutes an essential task for teachers as much as their classroom teaching. The research on teacher socialisation did address this issue (e.g. Zeichner & Gore, 1990; Bullough, Knowles & Crow, 1992), but with a strong focus on the loss or 'washing out' of the teacher training impact, once teachers are confronted with 'real professional life' (Lacey, 1977; Sikes, Measor & Woods, 1985; Wideen et al., 1998). Kuzmic's ethnographic case study on the socialisation process of one teacher is an interesting exception. Kuzmic takes an interactive view, emphasising "not only the potential contributions of the individual to the process of becoming a teacher, but the highly context-specific nature of this process" (Kuzmic, 1994, p.16). His work shows the need for beginning teachers to develop what Blase has called "organisational literacy" and concludes: "Without some basic understanding of the organisational life of schools, however, beginning teachers may be ill-equipped to deal with the problems and difficulties they encounter or develop the political tactics and teaching strategies needed to resist (...) and challenge the pressures to conform, many of which stem from the institutional characteristics of schools as bureaucratic organisations" (Kuzmic, 1994, p.24). The importance of organisational literacy to beginning teachers is also exemplified in Rust's case study of two teachers during their first year of teaching: "As beginners, they were unaware of school politics. Both were surprised by the lack of collegiality among their peers; they learned quickly not to trust anyone, especially not the principal. Both were fearful of being perceived as inept, thus they were rendered mute when they needed help most. Each experienced loneliness and insecurity. While both claimed not to have lost their commitment to teaching, they become disillusioned with the system and depressed and insecure about their own performance and abilities..." (Rust, 1994, p.215).

Joining the interactive view, we conceive of *teacher socialisation* not simply as passively sliding into an existing context, but rather as an interpretative and interactive process between the new teacher and the context. In this mutual interaction, socialisation means that the beginning teacher is influenced by the context, but at the same time at his/her turn affects the structures in which s/he is socialised (Zeichner & Gore, 1990). Bullough and Knowles contended: "Individuals are never passive receptors of social norms or of presented content; they always remake them in some fashion" (Bullough & Knowles, 1991, p.138). Or in Gold's words: "Learning the perceptions that new teachers have regarding their role as teacher and understanding how they perceive the totality of the experience is essential" (Gold, 1996, p.588).

In this paper we focus on that socialisation, the meaningful interaction between the beginning teacher and the school as an organisation (with its different actors). We want to understand the character of

these interactions and how they affect actions and beliefs of the beginning teachers. We assume that the experience of the induction period is to an important degree determined by the organisational contexts and working conditions beginning teachers have to work in and as such not only or even not primarily by problems at the classroom level.

Our study thus wants to complement the existing research on beginning teachers and aims at contributing to a better understanding of the specific professional experiences of beginning teachers. As such this study is situated in a larger research project on teachers' professional development during their entire career (see Kelchtermans, 1993, 1996; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). This professional development is conceived of as a career-long process of learning and development, resulting from the meaningful interaction between the teacher and the professional context in which he/she is working. The induction phase or the first years of the career are a time of intensive behavioural and conceptual professional learning and thus of professional development (Huberman, 1989; Kagan, 1992; Kelchtermans, 1993).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In his recent review of the research on 'becoming a teacher', Bullough concluded: "Midst the diversity of tales of becoming a teacher and studies of the content and form of the story, two conclusions of paramount importance to teacher educators emerge: prior experience and beliefs are central to shaping the story line, as is the context of becoming a teacher" (Bullough, 1997, p.95). Our approach of teacher socialisation in a sense reflects this conclusion, as we combine two theoretical perspectives, the narrative-biographical perspective and the micro-political perspective. In the narrative-biographical perspective (Kelchtermans, 1993) we emphasise the subjective meaning that (beginning) teachers give to their career experiences. In order to understand the interaction between the beginning teacher and the school as an organisation, we use the micro-political approach (Ball, 1987, 1994; Blase, 1997), paying special attention to the different interests that determine the thoughts and actions of the organisation members. We will discuss both perspectives in some more detail now.

2.1. The narrative-biographical perspective

The narrative-biographical perspective on teachers' professional development gives a central place to teachers' career experiences and more in particular to the meaning these experiences get for the teacher. [1] This meaning can be reconstructed through interpretative analysis of teachers' stories, the narratives teachers construct to make sense of their career experiences (Kelchtermans, 1993; Carter & Doyle, 1996). In this analysis of the career stories the narrative character of the data remains respected. In other words, grasping and understanding the meaningful connections within the stories of experiences remains the central aim. Kelchtermans operationalised and used this perspective in his study of the professional development of experienced primary school teachers (Kelchtermans, 1993,

1994, 1999). He showed how teachers develop from their career experiences *a personal interpretative framework*, a set of cognitions that operates as a lens through which teachers perceive their job situation, give meaning to it and act in it. Within this framework two important and interwoven domains could be identified. First there are the teacher's conceptions about him/herself as a teacher: *the professional self*. Through analysis of the career stories Kelchtermans distinguished five components in this professional self: the self image (descriptive component: who am I as a teacher?), the self esteem (the evaluative component: how well I am doing my job as a teacher?), the job motivation (the conative component: what motives me to become a teacher, to be a teacher and to remain one?), the task perception (the normative component: what do I consider to be my task as a teacher?, what should I do in order to be a proper teacher?) and the future perspective (prospective component: hoe do I look at the years to come in my career and how do I feel about it?). The second component is the *subjective educational theory*: the personal system of knowledge and beliefs on teaching. The subjective educational theory thus contains the teacher's practical knowledge, that provides the personal answer to the questions "how should I deal with a specific situation in my job?" and "why do I think this is the most effective way to do so?". The confrontation between the professional self and the subjective educational theory, as developed during teacher training on the one hand and the experience of the full responsibility for a group of pupils on the other, often leads to tensions, doubts, and possibly revisions of the personal interpretative framework. Cole and Knowles (1993) use the metaphor of "shattered images" to typify this experience for many beginning teachers.

2.2. The micro-political perspective

At the start of their career, most primary teachers in Flanders (Belgium) get the full responsibility for a group of pupils (a class). At the same time they also have to find and negotiate their place as a member of the organisation a school is. The important actors in this organisation are the principal, the teacher-colleagues, parents and school board members (see also Gold, 1996, p.579). They all have certain (more or less shared, more or less explicit) normative ideas about good teaching and how they are to be achieved in practice. The school as an organisation lives by certain traditions and habits, or more or less subtle power relations between (groups of) school members, with different interests... In other words, the beginning teacher is confronted with a micro-political reality in his/her job situation. Or as Schempp et al. observed in their micro-political analysis of teacher induction: "The classroom responsibilities facing the inductees had less to do with teaching children and more to do with juggling the multiple demands of a functioning institution" (Schempp et al., 1993, p.459).

The micro-political perspective takes the idea of different interests among members of an organisation as a central focus in its understanding of organisational behaviour. The micro-political reality, then, refers to the strategies and tactics used by individuals and groups in an organisation to further their interests (Hoyle, 1982). Power and influence, however, don't only refer to tension, conflict, struggle and rivalry, but also encompass collaboration or coalition building in order to achieve certain valued goals (Blase, 1991). As such the micro-political perspective deals with an essential dimension in organisations: micro-political processes simply occur in any organisation, in processes of collaboration

as well as in resistance; within the organisation as well as in the interactions with the external environment. Micro-politics are a natural phenomenon in the functioning of organisations (Ball, 1994; Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996).

As such the micro-political perspective provides an alternative for certain shortcomings of traditional models of organisation (system theory). Blase contends: "In essence, political theorists have argued that rational and systems models of organisations have failed to account for complexity, instability, and conflict in organisational settings. They contend that such models also ignore individual differences, for example, in values, ideologies, choices, goals, interests, expertise, history, motivation, and interpretation-factors central to the micro-political perspective" (Blase, 1991, p. 3). The micro-political approach points at often neglected aspects of power and its use in organisations. Central in its focus are the personal or collectively shared interpretations of these political processes by the members of the organisation, and thus also their choices, values, interests, motives as well as their individual career stories, intertwined with the history of the school. In other words, the micro-political and the narrative-biographical perspective share the same core ideas and are complementary.

Actions and thoughts of organisation members are to an important degree determined by interests. Taking up this central idea from the micro-political perspective, we linked it to the concept of "working conditions" (Kelchtermans, 1996). All teachers and principals hold beliefs about what entails good teaching and what conditions are necessary or desirable to perform their professional tasks properly. "Properly" means both "effectively" (achieving the desired outcomes) and "satisfying" to the person involved. These desirable or necessary working conditions operate as *professional interests* to the people involved. Through micro-political actions teachers and principals will strive to establish the desired working conditions, to safeguard them when they are threatened or to restore them if they have been removed. *Micro-political action* we thus understand as *those actions that aim at establishing, safeguarding or restoring the desired working conditions.* This definition makes it possible to 'read' (interpret) specific behaviour in micro-political terms.

Based on a study of research literature (e.g. Ball, 1994; Blase, 1997; Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996) and our own research (Kelchtermans, 1996; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1998), we found five different categories of professional interests. These categories were labelled: material, organisational, social-professional, cultural-ideological and self-oriented interests. We used these categories as conceptual tools (sensitising concepts) in the interpretative analysis of the research data in this study on beginning teachers. We will discuss the different categories extensively when presenting the research findings.

To sum up: we used the narrative-biographical and the micro-political perspective as theoretical frames to explore and understand how the induction phase is experienced by teachers, focusing on aspects that have received little or no attention in research on beginning teachers so far. [2] The research questions in our study thus were:

1. How do beginning teachers experience their professional socialisation during the induction phase?

2. In what sense are beginning teachers confronted with the micro-political realities of schools during their professional socialisation (induction).

In this micro-political analysis we pay special attention to the different sorts of professional interests (desired working conditions) that are at stake during the induction phase, as experienced by the teachers themselves.

3. METHODOLOGY

The central focus of our study was the beginning teachers' experiences of their job situation and the meaning they gave to it. Data collection thus implied that beginning teachers were asked to look back in time and narratively reconstruct their career experiences.

3.1. The research group

As respondents in our study we had 14 beginning teachers in Flemish primary schools, who had received their teacher certificate from two teacher training institutes.[3] This way we were able to take into account the possible differential influence of the teacher training context and at the same time to limit the heterogeneity in this factor. We looked for respondents who had just left the induction phase and thus already had career experiences they could reflect back upon. We thus selected people who had been teaching for minimal 3 and maximum 5 years. In the research group were 10 women and 4 men. Every respondent was treated as an "individual case study" and the whole study was designed as a "multiple case study" (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 1989; Stake, 1996).

3.2. Data collection

The research methodology used in this study was a variant of the procedure for "autobiographical self thematisation" developed by Kelchtermans (1994, 1999). In this procedure respondents are stimulated to reflect back on their career (auto-biographical) and narratively share their experiences and the meaning they got for them (thematisation). In this study we adapted the procedure by starting with a *questionnaire* in which the respondents were asked to give a chronological overview of the formal career positions (contracts) they had occupied since they had left teacher training. Apart from the formal career, the questionnaire presented also three open questions on the perception of their actual job situation; on the evaluation of their teacher training experience, and a question aimed at identifying possible critical persons who had been particularly supportive during the induction phase. The questionnaires were received back by the researchers and used to prepare the narrative-biographical interview that followed. The questionnaire thus provided the interviewers with a kind of "robot picture" of the respondent, on the basis of which the researcher was better able to prepare the interview.
The narrative-biographical interview was semi-structured in form and basically consisted in a systematic exploration of the questionnaire data, both the formal career and the answers to the open

questions. The semi-structured form still allowed that rich data were collected in which the specific individual experiences of every respondent could be presented. The structuring of the data collection left enough commonalities in the approach to make a comparative analysis of the data possible.

3.3. Interpretative analysis

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed. The transcription protocols were divided in text fragments and coded. These codes were both descriptive (summarising the issues addressed in the fragment) and interpretative (codes reflecting the notions for the conceptual framework).

The interpretative analysis was done in two phases. In the first phase, the vertical analysis, the individual respondent was taken as the unit of analysis. After transcription and coding, a systematic summarizing report was written, presenting the relevant data of the respondent in a structured form (all reports had the same structure of paragraphs). This report was called the Professional Biographical and Micro-political Profile (brief: the Profile). The fixed structure of paragraphs in the Profile was the starting point for the second phase in the analysis, the horizontal or comparative analysis. In this phase we used a form of "constant comparative analysis" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to look for common patterns and processes that recurred across the different cases. Preliminary interpretations were developed, iteratively checked with all data and modified if necessary.

By explicitly describing the conceptual framework, the research procedure and the actual process of data collection and analysis (in a research log, kept by the researchers), we met the demand of "reliability" by making the whole research process open to critical inspection from others. Through careful interpretation of the data, -e.g. by having the same data analysed by different researchers and a collective discussion of these analyses-, we aimed at controlling the quality of the interpretations.

4. RESULTS

In this paper we present the results from our micro-political interpretative analysis of beginning teachers' career stories (horizontal analysis) with a focus on the different professional interests that are at stake for the teachers involved. The categories we developed in former studies (Kelchtermans, 1996; Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1998) again proved to be a meaningful conceptual tool to describe, disentangle and understand the different aspects of the micro-political reality. The confirmation of the value of these categories as analytical concepts constitutes an important research result in itself. The categories allow a more analytical and differentiated understanding of the complex phenomenon of micro-politics in schools en in beginning teachers' professional socialisation in particular. The distinction between the categories is conceptual and analytical in character, because they reveal different aspects of a phenomenon that in reality always manifests itself as a meaningful whole. This explains why in one and the same event or experience several different categories of

professional interests can be at stake simultaneously. We will now discuss in more detail the different categories of interests and how they determine the micro-political reality as perceived by the teachers.

4.1. Self interests

The professional self holds a prominent place in teachers' personal interpretative framework (Kelchtermans, 1993). Their beliefs about themselves as a teacher and in particular their self esteem and task perception are highly relevant to beginning teachers in order to deal with their job situation properly and to develop professionally (Kagan, 1992). Being a teacher and in particular being a "beginning" teacher implies far more than a merely technical set of tasks, that can be reduced to effectively applying curriculum knowledge and didactical skills. The person of the teacher is inevitably also at stake in these professional actions (Nias, 1989; Bullough, 1997, p.101ff). When one's identity as a teacher, one's professional self esteem or one's task perception is threatened by the professional context, then self interests emerge. They always concern the protection of one's professional integritiy and identity as teachers. Our data from the beginning teachers showed that self interests mainly had to do with looking for self affirmation, dealing with vulnerability and with the visibility in their job.

Looking for self affirmation

During their first years in the job, teachers heavily invest in the development of their self confidence as teachers. The judgement (assessment) by significant others plays a central role here. The importance of these experiences already becomes evident from the fact that teachers recounted them very vividly and in detail, even if they had occurred quite some time before and even if the events in themselves seem almost trivial to an outsider.

During her first interim job Nadine[4] received a lot of support from the principal. One day he told her about a pupil in her class who really hated to come to school before she was working in the school –as he had heard from the parents. This kid now seemed to *flourish* in Nadine's class. She felt honoured by the fact that the principal had also noticed the change in the girl's attitude and that he explicitly told her so. *I was really touched by him telling me this…and it gave me a lot of joy…I still remember the girl's name…* Acknowledgement and recognition by colleagues, parents and pupils are equally important sources for beginning teachers' positive self esteem (Gold, 1996, p.579). Veronica recalls her pupils' admiration for her fast grading of their home work and feeding it back to the class. They called here *"miss Miracle"*. Veronica loved *to get this kind of recognition by the kids and to feel that they really liked me as a person.*

Apart from the experiences with different actors in the work context, there are often also meaningful events in teachers' private life that affect their feelings of professional competence. Raoul published a booklet with poetry for children, that was positively received by the critics, but also by parents, colleagues and pupils. He felt proud about it and understood it as a public recognition of his skills and talents beyond his work in the classroom: *The kids understood the subtle tones and meanings in the*

words and then I felt: Yes!, I do seem to have some talents with children beyond effective classroom teaching.

Sometimes beginning teachers proactively start looking for public recognition and take up professional challenges that might contribute to that goal. Chantal quickly found out that the younger members of the school team were often asked to take care about special events, requiring creative work, like organising a fare-well party for the pupils of the sixth grade, providing a creative lay-out for pupils' exercise books or directing the pupils' annual theatre show. In these activities she felt she could show others her qualities and get their appreciation. That's why she often volunteered for these extra-jobs. To sum up, the experience of professional success inside and outside the classroom proves to be essential in the development of professional self confidence to beginning teachers. They strive for as much success experiences as possible and often proactively look for opportunities to demonstrate their competencies and have them recognized by significant others. This striving for recognition by themselves and others is to be understood as a 'politics of identity' (Kelchtermans, 1996): developing a socially recognized identity as a proper teacher is a highly valued working condition for any beginning teacher. If this recognition is threatened, teachers feel vulnerable, and uncertain. In other words, developing a positive professional self-esteem and self confidence is a process of continuous being torn between experiences of success and the threat of vulnerability.

Coping with vulnerability

In beginning teachers' career stories about their need for social recognition, this vulnerability constitutes the "other side of the coin" . Several sources for this vulnerability are mentioned (see also Kelchtermans, 1996). Firstly teachers feel vulnerable in the experience of their own limits in competence. Beginning teachers want to do a good job and heavily invest time and energy in their work. Valerie recalls her exhaustion after her first two weeks interim contract. She almost felt ashamed for her relief as the interim came to an end: *I hated myself for it…I thought: 'now look at you: this is what you want to do for the rest of your life and after only two weeks you are happy that it's over… that doesn't make sense! How to deal with that?*

Not only the experience of personal shortcomings or failure, but also external criticism increases the feelings of vulnerability. Professional relationships within the school are extremely important to beginning teachers in order to develop a positive self esteem. They are an essential source of recognition, but at the same time they are potential threats to this self esteem. Peggy got an interim job in a first Grade during the last few weeks before the school year ended. Two of the pupils in her class were not capable to pass to the second grade and had to stay down a grade. Some parents publicly uttered their suspicion that this was due to the lack of professional experience of the beginning teacher. This incident had brought Peggy to start questioning her own competencies, but her doubts were then taken away by the colleague she was replacing. This colleague emphasised that every year one or two pupils fell behind during the school year, because they couldn't keep up with the pace of the class group. She comforted Peggy and told her not to blame herself for she had done everything she could…

Coping with visibility

Teachers' vulnerability is further increased by the high degree of visibility in their professional activities, their "working in a fishbowl" (Blase, 1988, p.135). In spite of the relative isolation in their classroom, teachers are subjected to the observations by colleagues, principals, parents and others (Kelchtermans, 1993). This was also exemplified in the career stories of the beginning teachers: they ware highly aware that their actions were perceived, interpreted and judged by others and that these perceptions and judgements determined the image others built from them. What these others see (or believe to see) determines their evaluation of the beginning colleagues. This visibility is found in home work assignments, test reports for the parents, creative work that children take home... Beginning teachers feel that their professional competencies are thus evaluated only on a limited and even partial base (Kelchtermans, 1993). If pupils do well on their tests, this is motivating and reassuring to the beginning teacher. Bad test results often lead to self doubts and external criticism. Teachers often tend to blame themselves for pupils' failures.

In the relation with colleagues, visibility is particularly high when other teachers (e.g. during team teaching) are present in the class. Chantal admitted that she didn't feel at ease, when she was teaching while her colleague was sitting in the back of the classroom (grading tests. *I felt…a bit uncomfortable, just wasn't at ease, you know (…) I love to work with children, to have them as an audience. But I don't like adults to see me teaching. I just don't like to be breathed down my neck.*

Teachers' visibility is also very high at the play ground, in the floors or on the way to the swimming pool or other extra-muros activities. The way teachers deal with their pupils on these occasions, and in particular the degree to which they have authority and are able to "keep order", is by many outsiders used as a basis for judging the teacher's professional qualities. Hardly any teacher would deny the importance of this authority and effective management skills and as such it is no surprise that researchers often found that authority was the most important preoccupation for beginning teachers (Veenman, 1984). However, if one looks at this concern with authority through a micro-political lens, it becomes clear that this implies more than just a technical matter of skills, but that also self interests are at stake: beginning teachers are well aware that publicly manifesting their authority and management skills contributes to their positive evaluation as a "proper teacher" by significant others (principal, parents, colleagues). A stringent action in the class thus is often meant to prevent noise, because this noise might lead colleagues to negative conclusions about one's quality as a teacher. Petra stated: *Oh yes, I keep on a short rein. You know, just prevent them from getting too noisy…I don't want my colleague next door to start thinking that I can't control my kids…*

This need to prove themselves in the eyes of others, even extends beyond the school as such. One example from Petra: she had a kid that regularly flew into a temper. Small conflicts, harmless teasing from other kids could easily make him outrageous. Petra knew that ignoring this behaviour for a couple of minutes was enough to calm the boy down. However, once, on an excursion the boy got one of his tempers as they were passing a rather crowded street. Petra felt she couldn't just ignore it now, for *all these people were standing there, watching us, watching me… I was terribly embarrassed.*

wished I could vanish, disappear…I mean, I was so powerless and exhausted. I felt so humiliated having all these eyes on me… Petra felt condemned by the bystanders, she felt shame and a strong sense of professional failure in this incident. She even started to question herself as a teacher, and it was only but thanks to the support and comfort by several colleagues that she managed to put the incident into perspective and keep up her self confidence (self esteem).

4.2 Material interests

Material interests refer to the availability of and teachers' access to teaching materials (books, video-recorders, etc), funds, specific infrastructure (sport facilities, computer room, library, copying facilities) and time (e.g. time for meeting with colleagues during school hours, preparing common lessons or tests, etc.). Clear and relevant information about material facilities and all kinds of procedures in the school constitute a very important working condition to beginning teachers. In case of an interim, it is important to the 'stand in'-teacher to have the absent teacher's lesson plans, handbooks, etc. at one's disposal. Getting time to prepare for the job is also a 'material' interest. In reality beginning teachers are often informed at short notice about a job and have to start immediately. The availability of materials then is of even greater importance. Manipulating this information or these materials e.g. by colleagues makes the beginning teachers feel very vulnerable and can easily put an extra burden on their work life.
Most beginning teachers, however, also spent a lot of time on careful lesson planning, inventing creative learning activities and developing teaching materials (not just creating them, but also make them look nice and attractive). From teachers' stories one learns, that these are not just material, technical or organisational issues, but that they often (more or less consciously) disguise a micro-political agenda of self presentation. Teachers make all those efforts, not just to please their pupils (and get their appreciation), but they are well aware of the fact that these materials, the works of art children take home, etc. in a sense operate as their "business card" that is seen by parents, colleagues and principal and that might contribute to a positive image of their professional competencies (and thus enhance their chances on future employment). Through those materials the beginning teachers make themselves visible as teachers and 'advertise' implicitly for their professional competence (Kelchtermans, 1996; see below).

The micro-political importance of teaching materials sometimes moves beyond the classroom and becomes an issue at school level. Teaching materials always carry with them as a symbolical load a normative idea about good teaching and are as such meaningful artefacts that either converge or conflict with the dominant school culture. This becomes very clear in Christine's story. As she got a job in a very strict, traditional religious school for girls, she found herself both amazed and indignant about the poor facilities and the dramatical lack of teaching material: no manuals, no books for the pupils, no teaching materials, not even materials for art education. However, this lack of material reflected a basic idea from the educational 'mission' of the school: educating girls to become pious wives, with

respect for tradition and religion. Didactics were only secondary to these core goals. Christine needed the job, but felt she simply couldn't work properly under those conditions. Furthermore, Christine felt that her didactical, professional teaching qualities were looked down upon by the school board and the traditionalist faction in the school team. So she started collecting all kinds of books, teaching materials, second-hand computers and used them in her teaching. This was not just a means to enhance her professional self esteem, keep up her personal task perception and achieve a minimal job satisfaction, but unintentionally and inevitably became an issue of counter-culture, of political action in the school as a whole. Within the school team there was a strong traditional faction representing the religious minority that ran the school and a group of teachers who didn't belong to this church and were responsible for the non-religious curriculum. The school principal didn't try to reconcile both groups, but as Christine (who quickly became the spokeswoman of part of the school team) got the explicit support from the parents, she just let her do her thing. Without going into further detail, this example shows that teachers' efforts in what seem merely material issues, often also reflect self interests as well as cultural-ideological interests, concerning different ideas about 'good teaching' (in this case the tension between Christine's task perception and the dominant values in the school culture). In other words, a micro-political analysis shows that it is important to understand material issues also from their symbolical meaning in the organisational context, if one wants to develop an adequate understanding of (beginning) teachers' job experiences (Kelchtermans, 1996).

4.3. Organisational interests

Organisational interests contain procedures, roles, positions or formal tasks in the school. Our study confirmed the conclusion that "getting and keeping a job" (=formally being a member of a school team) is the central organisational interest to beginning teachers (Kelchtermans, 1993).[5] From the beginning teachers' career stories we identified two sub-themes in this concern: the meaning of being unemployed, looking for a job and the way beginning teachers selectively deal with actual job opportunities.

The absence of a job and looking for employment

The experience of unemployment entails more than an organisational working condition. In the absence of a contract, beginning teachers simply don't have a chance to practice their job and thus develop their professional identity and their self esteem. The longer the time of uncertainty about a job, the more beginning teachers' self esteem becomes threatened and the more they start doubting their professional competencies. Valerie puts it like this: *You feel absolutely worthless... you feel like a parasite*. And there is the permanent concern to be there and ready in case an offer would come. *I hardly dared to go out, ... imagine there was a phone call with an offer and I wasn't there*... Kathleen invested in a mobile phone that could be left with the neighbours in case she was unable to answer a call.

Similar, but slightly different concerns showed up in teachers' dealing with the end of an interim contract. To beginning teachers, these ends were often rather painful and emotional moments. Not just because they lost their job, but also because the locally developed identity as a teacher was about to be lost. Petra felt like a *throw-away article…you are welcome to be used for a couple of weeks and then you are supposed to leave, just like that.* Apart from their job teachers also loose their role and position. The end of an interim contract also implied giving up their identity, the social status and recognition and the interpersonal relations that were developed in the job with pupils, colleagues, and parents.

Choosing among job offers

How do beginning teachers deal with job offers and which interests play a part in their choices? It is hardly surprising that in balancing the cost/benefits of job offers the perspective on a job and on future job opportunities is the most important determinant to beginning teachers. Practical difficulties (e.g. distance to the school) or personal preferences (e.g. for a particular grade) are secondary, because – as Petra put it- *the thing is to get a job… a job is a job.*

Beginning teachers quickly learn to act strategically to safeguard future job opportunities. Chantal got an interim job in School 1 in her hometown, but knew that there were no chances for a contract renewal in that school. In the village there was an ongoing conflict between School1 and another primary school (School 2), in which Chantal hoped to get future employment. During the last weeks of her interim, she stopped being the silent young team member, but more clearly and frankly expressed her point of view on several issues. She even engaged in critical discussions with the principal of School1, because she felt *They can't do me any harm anymore. I won't have a job here next year, so I just tell them how I see things.* But even in this situation she realised that provoking conflicts by being too critical, might still have negative consequences in the future, so she concluded *well, to some degree one always has to watch one's tongue… in the end, it's your future chances to earn a living, we're talking about…*

Because of their vulnerable and dependent position as unemployed teacher, beginning teachers sometimes give in to the pressure to take up extra-duties in exchange for a job. Another example from Chantal's story: in exchange for a third interim job in the same school, the president of the school board (=the local priest) wanted her to join the volunteers that gave confirmation classes. Chantal agreed because she wanted as quickly as possible to achieve the minimum seniority in order to get the legally defined priority among candidates for future jobs. Her acceptance of the extra duties (outside the school) was a strategic option to gain the support of the chair in the school board, who had an powerful voice in staff hiring decisions, and thus to secure future job perspectives.

Beginning teachers also tend to look for a job in schools where they are not complete strangers, because they did had done part of their teaching practice in the school, because they personally know people in the staff or because they had worked there before. In Erwin's subjective theory on the 'patterns' in staff hiring policies, this sounded as follows: *Schools select whom they know. If they know who you are, where you come from…or if you have been there before, you simply have a better chance to get appointed.* It is of course also in the interest of the beginning teachers themselves to get

a job in a professional context that is not totally unfamiliar to them. Here again, self interests intertwine with the organisational interest of getting a job. Beginning teachers expect to more easily find their place in the team and feel at ease, if they can go back to schools they have already worked in. They also expect to get more recognition, because colleagues and principals already have an idea about his/her competencies. So there is a bigger chance to obtain satisfaction in their job.
However, there is another side to this coin as well. Raoul got a job in a school where he had spent a difficult time of his teaching practice, struggling with a series of problems. At the end of it, he only got a relatively poor mark by his supervisor from the teacher training institute. During these weeks he had been seeing the principal about his difficulties, desperately looking for support. Therefor his feelings toward this interim job were rather ambivalent. On the one hand he valued the fact that he got a second chance, but on the other he felt embarrassed because *that principal must have remembered me as the boy who had been sitting desperately and crying in his office*... He thus felt he couldn't really make a fresh start in that school.

4.4 Cultural-ideological interests

Cultural-ideological interests concern the more or less explicit norms, values and ideals that get acknowledged in the school as legitimate and binding elements of the school culture. They also encompass the processes and interactions of 'defining' that culture (Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996). In spite of legal prescriptions about curriculum, staffing, and funding, daily work life in a school, but also the goals, values and norms underlying it, are to a large degree object of negotiation and cultural definition processes by the members of the organisation. Schools are 'loosely coupled organisations' (Weick, 1976), in important ways characterised by discussions and actions between competing ideas about goals. These discussions are essentially matters of ideological struggle (Ball, 1994; Altrichter & Salzgeber, 1996). We found that the cultural-ideological interests to most of the beginning teachers only came into play when they observed discrepancies between their own personal interpretative framework and the dominant culture (values, norms) in the school, or when they stayed in that school for a relatively long period (e.g. a full year). If they only did an interim job of a few weeks, most respondents made sure to stay out of discussions (negotiations) and simply adapted to the situation. But even in the case of longer contracts, many teachers still didn't commit themselves to these processes of cultural negotiation and complied to the dominant values.
The only respondent in our study who really told about proactive engagement in processes of cultural definition and negotiation was Christine during her job in the very traditional religious school (see above). The norms of this school were opposite to the most fundamental beliefs in her task perception and Christine made this very explicit to pupils, colleagues and principal. Her story reveals how she got to understand the dominant culture and –by trial and error- managed to modify and influence it according to her personal beliefs. Implicit sympathy from the principal made things easier and both of them negotiated how things could be changed for the better and how the different views might be reconciled. Christine did acknowledge the dominant culture, took into account sensitive issues among

the traditionalists, but kept working to change things and improve the quality of the education. As the principal saw her political tactfulness and the positive reactions she got from the parents, she enlarged her degrees of freedom. Christine's position in the school team became stronger and she became the spokeswoman of the non-religious team members. Although Christine's story most clearly illustrates cultural-ideological interests, it is as such a rare example of political efficacy by a beginning teacher at the level of the school as an organisation. Still, she only achieved that her practice was tolerated, but not a fundamental shift in the dominant school culture. The relationship between the two cultures within the staff was one of 'live and letting live'.

4.5 Social-professional interests

Social-professional interests are about the quality of the interpersonal relationships in and around the school as an organisation. Almost every teacher in our sample strongly emphasised the importance of good relationships with other members of the school. Nadine: *I can't work properly if I don't feel at ease with colleagues or in the school climate.* Maria hardly paid any attention to colleagues in her first interim jobs because she was too preoccupied with her concern of teaching her class in the best possible way, and believing this was her first responsibility and hers alone. She lived in her classroom as on an island and felt very isolated. Step by step she found out that she actually needed the support, recognition and appreciation by colleagues even to do a proper job in her classroom.
Opportunities to share concerns with colleagues or to discuss didactical questions are a very important working condition to beginning teachers. Job offers from schools with bad social-professional relationships or a negative school climate, were in some cases turned down by beginning teachers, on the basis of earlier experiences in those schools. Valerie worked in a school with a strong climate of mistrust, conflict, suspicion and gossip. At the end of the year, all non-tenured team members were invited one by one by the principal to discuss possible contracts for the next school year. Valerie didn't even go to the meeting, because she was so fed up with the social context in the school that she didn't even consider future contracts in the same school, in spite of the threat of unemployment.
Social-professional interests often appear to be more important than other interests. Several respondents told how they silently endured negative situations in the school because the risk of troubled relationships with colleagues was not outweighed by the potential gains of improved working conditions.

An example from Kathleen's story once again illustrates that social-professional interests often also reflect self interests. Kathleen got a four month interim job in a third grade. It was her ninth interim in two years and she was getting tired of having to start in *a new school again, new children in my class again, new colleagues again, another start again...* Furthermore because she only got a two weeks contract (although that was renewed several times) Kathleen couldn't properly plan ahead. Before her arrival at the school, the class had been taught by several other interim teachers already, who hadn't

left good records about their work. This further complicated Kathleen's task to assess where the pupils were in the curriculum program. Kathleen nevertheless worked with high commitment. The positive relationships she developed with the principal and the colleagues encouraged her to go on. Kathleen felt appreciated as a full member of the team and not just as a beginning teacher. However, one day the principal came to see her and asked how things were going in her class because some parents had come to see him with doubts and critics about her work. They had been wondering whether the children would learn and work enough with this young teacher. Kathleen was indignant about the parents' going behind her back: *These people walk into the play ground, say a friendly hello and then move on to the principal's office to go and complain about my work*... This suspicion and hypocrisy made her angry, but she was particularly offended by the fact that the parents had gone to see the principal without talking to her first. Kathleen immediately decided to proactively deal with the situation. Together with the principal, she organised an extra parents' evening, in which she explained her way of working and took the time to answer questions by the parents. She told them she could very well empathise with their concerns about the fact that their children were now taught by a beginning teacher, but at the same time she emphasised her strong commitment and explicitly invited parents to come and see her directly in case they had any questions about her teaching. The meeting went very well, also because of the principal's supportive presence. Afterwards one pupil told Kathleen *My mam thinks you're a wonderful teacher*... This simple feedback confirmed Kathleen that her coping strategy had worked the way she had hoped for and this gave her intense satisfaction. The contacts with the parents developed positively afterwards and Kathleen got several explicit signs of appreciation from them.

In this story fragment one can see how the different categories of professional interests play together and determine the choice of action strategies. The organisational conditions for Kathleen were far from ideal: short-term contract and job insecurity. Therefor Kathleen had to stick to the existing lesson plans and couldn't develop her own planning for a longer term, although this way of working was not congruent with her task perception. Social-professionally she had the important support of principal and colleagues. But the final motivation for her action (= organising the parents' evening) came from self interests: she wanted to be recognized as a competent teacher, not only by the principal, but also by the parents (see also Kelchtermans, 1996).

The distinction between the different categories of professional interests is made for interpretative-analytical reasons. In reality –as we have shown- several categories play their part simultaneously. Furthermore the discussion of the categories has also showed that self interests are almost always at stake in any micro-political action.

5. MICRO-POLITICAL ACTIONS AND LITERACY

5.1. Actions, strategies, and tactics

Our analysis of beginning teachers' career stories clarified the self-evident presence of a micro-political dimension in their job experiences. The analysis also illustrates what actions teachers choose to become micro-politically active. In his study on teachers' vulnerability, Blase (1988) situated the different political strategies on a continuum, moving from reactive to proactive and distinguished six of them: acquiescence, conformity, ingratiation, diplomacy, passive-agressiveness and confrontation. Reactive strategies aim at maintaining the situation or protecting the teacher against changes or external influences. Proactive strategies are directed towards changing the situation and influencing the conditions. A clear example of a reactive strategy is Chantal's avoidance to take a stance in the conflict between the two schools in her hometown in order not to jeopardize her chances for future employment. Examples of proactive strategies can be found in the stories of Christine and Kathleen. Christine actively worked to change the dominant culture in the school, engaged in discussions with the principal and other team members; started using teaching materials and methods that were unusual in the school. Motivated by a strong task perception and job motivation she worked to establish more desirable working conditions in her school. Although this implied confrontations, Christine managed through tactful and diplomatic interventions to achieve her goals. Kathleen also proactively reacted to parents' complaints by inviting them to a meeting, explaining her way of teaching and facing the parents' questions. In both stories one can observe the crucial importance of the principal's support in these matters.
In general we recognize in Blase's different action strategies our definition of micro-political action in terms of safeguarding or restoring (rather reactive) on the one hand and establishing (rather proactive) desirable working conditions on the other hand. However, we think that these different variants of micro-political action have to be understood as cyclical or iterative, rather than as positions on a continuum. Actions to restore lost working conditions are for example reactive in goal and direction of action, but they imply proactive strategies that aim at changing the situation. [6]

It is clear that micro-political action can take very different forms in reality: talking, pleading, arguing, being silent and avoiding comments, avoiding to take sides, accepting extra duties (in exchange for a contract), changing the material working conditions, the use of humour, etc.. Our analysis shows that a simple inventory or list, summing up all micro-political strategies and actions is not relevant, and probably not even possible, because almost any action can become micro-politically meaningful in a particular context (Blase, 1991, p.11). As Blase argues, "micro-political significance may refer to the consequences or the meaning that actions have for others" (Blase, 1997, p.942). Whether and in what sense a particular action achieves micro-political significance is dependent on and must be understood from the concrete interactions between the individual and the specific context.

5.2. Micro-political literacy

This analysis further implies that learning to "read" situations through a micro-political lens, understanding them in terms of different interests as well as learning to effectively deal with them (coping strategies), constitutes an important agenda for teachers' professional development. The result of this professional learning process we label as *micro-political literacy* (see also Blase & Anderson, 1995). This micro-political literacy entails at least three aspects: the knowledge aspect, the operational or instrumental aspect and the experiential aspect (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1996).
The *knowledge aspect* concerns the knowledge necessary to acknowledge ("see"), interpret and understand ("read") the micro-political character of a particular situation. In other words, the 'micro-politically literate' teacher is capable of politically "reading" situations, because s/he owns the necessary "grammatical" and "lexical" knowledge on processes of power and struggles of interests. This knowledge thus is part of the teacher's subjective educational theory and varies from rudimental and superficial to refined and complex understandings.
The *instrumental or operational* aspect encompasses the repertoire of micro-political strategies and tactics a teacher is able to effectively apply (how broad is the repertoire?; how high the degree of mastery?) in order to establish, safeguard or restore desirable working conditions. It is important to stress that the micro-political meaning of actions is always connected to the particularities of the local context: strategies that work at home or in the sports club, might not work in the school; or strategies that had proved to work in School 1 might be ineffective in School 2. Developing micro-political literacy is thus always context-bound. The operational aspect thus refers to the political efficacy of the teacher: to what extent and under what conditions is the teacher capable of effectively influencing the situation, either proactively or reactively, to put it in Blase's terms (1988; 1991).
The *experiential aspect*, finally, refers to the degree of (dis)satisfaction the teacher feels about his/her micro-political literacy. The confrontation with the micro-political reality and the inherent need to effectively react in it, provoke particular experiences. The experience of the micro-political reality quite often triggers intense emotions: discomfort and uncertainty, powerlessness and sometimes anger (*I can see how things are played out here, but I feel powerless to do something about it*), frustration and vulnerability (*I find myself forced to do and implement things opposite to my own opinions and beliefs*...)(Kelchtermans, 1996). Of course those feelings can also be positive: joy, experiencing success and satisfaction, e.g. if one has been able to successfully tackle a difficult situation or gets the rest of the team to accept one's proposal to solve a problem.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The micro-political analysis of beginning teachers' career stories showed that micro-politics encompass both struggle and conflict, and collaboration and coalition building. In reality this can take the form of very different actions, depending on the meaningful interaction between the individual

teacher and the professional context. Teachers' actions and their micro-political significance can never be properly understood without taking into account the specific context.
In order to analytically unravel the micro-political elements in beginning teachers' career stories (experiences) the conceptualisation of micro-politics in terms of desirable working conditions (professional interests) and different categories in those interests, proved to be an effective analytical tool. The analysis furthermore revealed how in specific interactions and situations often more than one category of interests is at stake.

Our findings show that micro-politics is an important issue in teachers' experience of their induction phase. The importance and relevance is not just for theory building on teacher development, but also for optimising teacher education and induction programs and strategies (e.g. mentoring). Both in initial training and in induction programmes the professional socialisation and the micro-political reality of schools deserve explicit attention (Ball, 1994; Goodman, 1988; Kuzmic, 1994). The development of micro-political literacy should start during teacher education. At least in Flemish elementary schools, the micro-political aspects of the praxis shock are still very real. And this was not significantly changed by longer periods of teaching practice during teacher training and a common discourse by policy makers and teacher educators acknowledging the need for specific support of beginning teachers. The teaching practice in particular seems to provide a potentially rich environment for micro-political learning by student-teachers. In assignments and support activities during teaching practice (e.g. supervision and inter-vision) the attention to the micro-political aspects in the school reality should be brought up and focused on explicitly. This might be done through specific assignments for reflection on teaching experiences or forms of small-scale action research by the student teachers in their own practice. The focus could then be on identifying the different professional interests and analysing their influence on individual teacher's actions and thinking and on teacher collaboration within the school. The processes of self-presentation and of positioning oneself by the student teacher in the teaching practice school is another important issue to focus on.
This way the development of micro-political literacy as part of teachers' professional development could find a systematic start during initial teacher training. Blase recently concluded that "although teacher education programs may give some attention to the cultural and social dimensions of teaching, the micro-politics of teaching has been virtually ignored. This point is particularly significant, since micro-politics is pervasive in the classroom, the school, and the community" and holds a strong plea to integrate micro-politics in teacher education and in-service training (Blase, 1997, p.962-963). Yet, it goes without saying, that the role of micro-politics in teacher development needs further exploration in research. From our own work we believe it would be particularly interesting to have more studies –complementary to the retrospective approaches in most research- using a follow-up design to study the actual development of micro-political literacy and the determinants of this learning process.

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7 Notes

[1] A more extensive discussion of the narrative-biographical approach can be found in Kelchtermans (1993). This perspective integrates both the tradition of biographical and life history research (e.g. Goodson, 1992) and the narrative approaches to teachers and teaching (e.g. Carter & Doyle, 1996; Casey, 1995-1996) and positions itself in line with the so –called "teacher thinking"-research.

[2] See for an exception: Schempp et al., 1993

[3] Teacher education for primary schools (all pupils between 6-12years old) takes place during a three year training at the Teacher Training Departments of the Institutes for Higher Education (Hogescholen).

[4] All names are pseudonyms referring to the respondents in our research group. Wordly quotes from the interviews are printed in italics.

[5] For this reason one might argue that this strong concern with job opportunities and one's own career in general demands for a separate category of professional interests. It seems, however, that these concerns are typical for beginning teachers. Once a tenured position as classroom teacher is achieved, this concern simply disappears (see also Kelchtermans, 1993). Furthermore there is hardly any concern among Flemish teachers with "career" in terms of vertical promotion, because there simply are almost no opportunities (with principalship being the only exception). As Nias (1989) rightly argues one can also think in terms of horizontal careers: teachers that take up specific tasks or responsibilities within the school team: coordinating the implementation of a new handbook; mentoring beginning colleagues) etc. To what degree these formal tasks and roles operate as professional interests (desired working conditions) will depend on the global organisational conditions and can as such rightly be caught by the label "organisational interests".

[6] The same can be said about the five political tactics Goodman identified in his study of pre-service teachers during their teaching practice: overt compliance, critical compliance, accomodative resistance, resistant alteration and transformative action (Goodman, 1988). However, because the role and position of student teachers during their teaching practice is fundamentally different from that of beginning teachers, who are formally real staff members, we don't think it is justified to simply transfer these findings and discuss them further. Yet a further empirical exploration of student teachers' micro-political learning during teaching practice is still a very important issue for further research.